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Working on Module in Production: Employability and Careers

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Working on Modules in Production: Employability and Careers

Roland Fletcher

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Working on modules in production: Employability and Careers

We are often asked the questions:

1. How does learning take place?
2. Where does learning take place?
3. How do you know learning is taking place?

These are questions that naturally arise when dealing with modern principles and practices of Western education. This will drive you into the theoretical approaches of how learning is devised, delivered and assessed. It is knowing how the foundations work and how you put them in to practise.

As educationalists it is our role to design, develop and produce educational provision that will facilitate learning. How this learning takes place; where it takes place and how you know learning has taken place is linked to the theory of learning. Below is a statement which tries to capture the role of the educationalist:

The role of the educational professional and the speed at which educational reforms have been introduced within higher education has transformed the academic into a manager. This is explained through a variety of changes; for example, technology and the transformation of traditional workplaces being replaced by virtual workplace through the use of computing and advanced communication networks. The UK government[s] has developed the role of the academic by producing policies that have initiated mass higher education and increased the number of knowledge-based workers to manage employability within a global market. This process has produced the managerial tutor. The managerial tutor is the amalgamation of the academic and manager who must be committed to the development of total quality through the delivery of educational provision within both domestic and global markets

(Fletcher, R., (2007) The Managerial Tutor: A producer of Knowledge in a Global Arena, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol.29, No.3, pp.303-13).

For those of you who have been working as a central academic at the Open University for a number of years you may feel you have an affinity with this statement. You may feel that as a production chair or presentation chair you can relate to the description as a managerial tutor. When I wrote that article I was reflecting on my experience as an educationalist; a professional practitioner. I had seen my role as a teacher in the classroom change and I was moving out of the classroom and into the production of educational provision. I was moving from preparing lessons to producing undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. These awards were for internal students at higher educational institutions and external students through public bodies and corporate clients. I was being asked to design, develop educational provision which was bespoke. I was in a position where I would work with a range of stakeholders who needed educational provision in order to develop knowledge, skills and application of the legal rules that would support higher educational institutions and businesses. My role was merging, changing and I coined the phrase “managerial tutor”.

So why am I sharing this with you? The theme is working on modules in production: Employability and Careers. I am looking back in order to look forward. For me, I see an underpinning theme which drives the way educational provision is designed, produced and delivered. This involves how learning takes place and where it may take place. Most importantly, it is about creating access to higher educational provision through the Open University platform. Providing an opportunity for those who wish to pursue a career through legal education. My experience at the Open University as a tutor (Associate Lecturer) and central academic has provided me with the opportunity to be part of the production and presentation process. Working with Student Experience Managers and Qualification Managers has shaped my role and how I deal with my day to day duties. This is experiential learning through a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The demands of reinventing and changing educational provision to accommodate the challenges faced by students who study at the Open University. This role has allowed me to be at the grass roots and see the

delivery of educational provision at operational level. This has allowed me to take this experience and develop the strategies that support students at operational level and ensure there is accessibility, which equals inclusion.

Barriers to higher educational provision

Without access to economic, social and cultural capital there are barriers. “In 21st – century England social, political and economic inequalities have been transformed into educational inequalities that have become the responsibility of the individual” Reay, 2017, p.114). In Diane Reay (2017) *Miseducation: Inequality, Education and the Working Classes*, Bristol: Policy Press she undertakes a number of interviews and provides some extracts from those interviews dealing with careers, social mobility and the problems faced by working classes students. In one of her interviews dealing with “outsiders on the inside: the working classes and higher education she shares the following extract:

I feel an idiot. I guess I just didn't get the right advice so I started my law degree thinking that was all I needed to be a human rights lawyer and of course it's nowhere near enough. So now I am doing a master's and my debt level is over £50,000 ... and I'm suddenly thinking how on earth am I going to get a job as a lawyer. I'll probably still be working in Next in five years' time and the only difference between me and the other shop assistants is that I've got shed-loads of debt.

Reay, p.117

This is a common theme that comes out of the interviews undertaken by Reay (2017).

Approaches to learning

Where and how does learning take place? If you were asked to say in no more than six words how learning takes place what would you say? Give it a go; try and put a sentence or phrase that would sum-up in no more than six words how and where learning takes place.

Educationalists develop their professional practices from theory, experience and sharing that experience. There is “nothing as practical as a good theory” (Lewin, 1943, p.35). Educational psychologists have produced theoretical constructs which provide us with a foundation from which we can build a framework that will support our students when designing and developing educational provision.

How we learn and where we learn is important when thinking about the design of a module. We, as the architects, are constructing a framework that will support learning in a way that will work for our students. Provide them with the means to develop their knowledge and skills. That sounds like the answer you may be looking for but how do you make it happen? Where does it happen? These are the questions that you need to ask yourself when designing educational provision for your students.

The learning strategy you adopt will be reflected in the design of your module. The way you break-up the learning and engage the student with the materials and tasks, such as creating a learning cycle which is integrated through the structure of the module. This will involve using a pedagogic approach (theory) that will support you with the design and tools you create. Understanding the different approaches to learning will allow you to explain and illustrate how learning is taking place within the individual units and throughout the development of your module.

Once you have identified the learning strategy or alternative approaches to learning you can say how you are producing materials, activities and engaging students in a way where learning can take place.

Putting learning in to practise

How you put your learning strategy into operation is fundamental as you will need to demonstrate the learning that should have taken place. Measuring learning through outcomes is the norm when designing educational provision. We are placed in a position, as educationalists, to say how we have made learning explicit by stating the learning outcome and how students will demonstrate these outcomes. This requires

us to be explicit and say how learning will take place and be assessed. This is how you are able to demonstrate a modification of behaviour and is underpinned by behaviourist principles that operate at all levels of learning.

Behaviourism – learning outcomes

The neo-behaviourist Benjamin Bloom developed the model that linked external and internal behaviours. This is the area that is mainly the focus when dealing with learning and assessment which translates learning into overt observable behaviours. For Bloom he saw this as a way of ranking the level of learning by using different cognitive domains.

Learning outcomes and learning design – some things to think about!


Each learning outcome has to be specific and at the right level for a year one, two and three undergraduate award. The learning outcomes are important and need to link directly with the activities. Each outcome must be measurable as they define what has to be learnt and how it will be attempted (demonstrated). Avoid using the wording 'understands' as this does not define the learning that will take place. It is too vague. For example, what level of understanding should the students be demonstrating. There is a tendency to use phrases such as: "The students will understand the legal rules dealing with X". Instead, try: "The students will be able to explain the X rule, or the students will be able to apply x rule". Use the verb which relates to the level of study.

When you are writing your learning outcome(s) think of what the student should be learning and how they will demonstrate that level of educational ability. It is important that the learning outcomes will demonstrate the learning that is taking place. When drafting your learning outcomes keep in mind the 'how' and 'what' and think of the students' needs and how the learning outcomes will link with the activities. As a rule of thumb the learning outcomes are divided between the levels of cognition. You must

be explicit when writing your learning outcomes. The student must know what they should be able to do after they have completed an activity.

You are designing and devising a learning activity and should have in mind what the student will be able to do (achieve) once this activity has been completed. This places the student in a position where they are able to practise and develop the skills and knowledge needed to complete the 'specific' task. When learning outcomes are specific you are able to assess the learning that has taken place. Below is a table which identifies some of the cognitive levels and the sliding scale between the different levels (years of study). Each learning outcome must be specific so it allows the students at all levels to understand exactly what is expected of them. A selected example is provided and additional linked outcomes are available.

An example of the cognitive level and selection of verbs used to reflect the level of learning that has or should take place.

Cognitive level	Scale	Some examples
Evaluation	High level	Judge, evaluate, assess and determine
Synthesis		Conclude, select, summarize, design and manage.
Analysis		Analyse, criticise, distinguish and contrast.
Application		Apply, demonstrate, illustrate, assess and find.
Comprehension		Identify, explain discuss, judge, and compare.
Knowledge	Low level	Describe, state, list, define and recall

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Remember, learning outcomes must be explicit as it will then allow the author to devise learning activities which will enable the student to demonstrate the outcome. This is how learning outcomes are measured and why they are sometimes referred to as behavioural objectives.

Quality Assurance Agency and Outcome based assessment

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has also produced some documents which provide benchmarks which identify the overall outcomes for various levels of study for undergraduates. These benchmarks define the academic standards that can be expected of a graduate, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies, and describes the nature of the subject. You may wish to [take a look at the benchmarks set for law students](#).

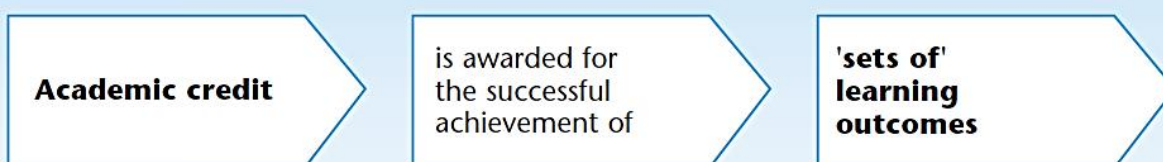
It is important to remember that the units in the module should be designed for a wide ranging audience. This is why different teaching strategies have been adopted to make sure learning is sequential. The units should be structured in a way that builds upon previous activities and links together information. This is part of the scaffolding put in place to support students. The tutorials or day-schools activities will need to provide an opportunity for learning to be directed by the tutor and for self-directed learning to take place. The activities will need different types of stimulus to engage students and ensure they are forming a relationship with the module materials.

Below is an extract taken from The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2009) [Academic Credit in Higher Education in England – An Introduction.](#)

Credit is awarded to you when you have shown, through assessment, that you have successfully completed a module or a programme by meeting the specific set of **learning outcomes** for that module or programme.

Statements of learning outcomes outline what you will know, understand and be able to do when you have successfully completed a piece of learning.

It is the achievement of the learning outcomes that is essential for the award of credit, not how or where the learning took place, or how it was assessed, or how long it actually took.



You usually demonstrate that you have achieved the learning outcomes of a module or qualification by successfully completing one or more pieces of assessed work to a minimum standard.

Exceeding the minimum standard does not result in you being awarded more credits, as the credit value is fixed before assessment.

What students will learn

The use of Bloom's work, particularly the cognitive domain, have been used as a planning tool when deciding what students will learn and when they will learn a specific aspect within the learning cycle. Identifying the outcomes will support with the planning of your module and how units are compartmentalised and cross-fertilised as the appropriate learning points within the module. Knowing what will be learnt (explicit outcomes) supports with the development of learning activities. The activities provide students with an opportunity to practise and behaviours, and to look for these behaviours through the assessments. Ensuring the students are exposed to the materials, activities and then link with the tuition strategy, such as the online tutorials will link the sequence of learning. This was an approach supported by Gagné who focussed on the importance of arranging stimuli to produce the most appropriate and desirable behavioural sequences. Gagné and Medsker(1996) is famous for the nine

‘internal processes and their corresponding instructional events’. Below is a table that illustrated how he used this to structure a lesson plan and the incorporation of learning materials.

Tutor’s action	Learner’s response
Gaining learner’s attention	Reception and attentiveness
Stating session objectives	Knowing what to expect
Reminding what was done before	Stimulation of long-term memory
Highlighting key features	Perceiving what is important
Structuring learning	Creating links and associations
Encouraging activity	Performing
Providing feedback	Learning awareness and satisfaction
Evaluating progress	Strengthening learning
Enhancing attention and signalling future learning	Gaining learning overview

How you see learning taking place

In the earlier section of the presentation you were asked how learning takes place. This provided you with an opportunity to think about how learning takes place, where it may take place and for you to say in no more than six words how this learning would take place. The purpose of my question was to see how you would construct learning. I now wish to focus on constructivism which focuses on what a student does with information to develop their knowledge. When dealing with the theory of constructivism you are trying to establish how learning is taking place, for example, how students actively build knowledge and demonstrate their understanding by synthesising their knowledge they already possessed with new information.

Constructing learning

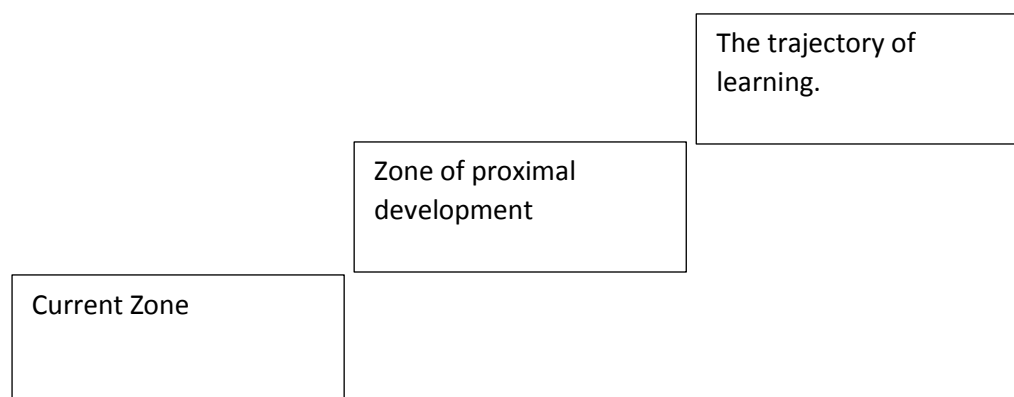
If you adopt a constructivist approach, learning is an active process through which learners ‘construct’ new meaning. The pioneers behind this approach to learning are

Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky and Bandura. I'm selecting a Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who supported the role of the teacher or expert in guided learning. Vygotsky was famous for his creation of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He defined the ZPD as:

... the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers

(Vygotsky, 1978 at p.86)

So, in the ZPD the more capable peer and the learner work on a task that the learner could not perform independently because of the level of work. At a later stage, the learner will be able to perform this same task without assistance due to the support provided by the tutor or guided by an experienced person.



Tiering the learning process

You are tiering the learning process. Knowing where the learner has been, where they are going and how they will get there. The ZPD is the potential distance the learner could reach with the help of a more capable peer. This is guided learning through active learning. This is about introducing the learner to what they do not already know or the skills they need to develop. That is why it is important to know where they should be on the learning spectrum. Where you want them to be at the next point of the spectrum and how they will get there. This should be part of your design stage when working on modules in production and linking with employability and the career

of the student. You are creating a structured learning journey for the student. As the learner masters the tasks the scaffolding is gradually removed. This is referred to as fading. You are passing more control to the learner and this will, in time, develop their confidence and independence as a learner.

An interactional space for learning to take place

You have been presented with a visual aid, a diagram for you to be able to see how the ZPD is used. It is an interactional space where the learner and expert/teacher interact. The teacher or expert is able to gauge the intellectual development of the learner. The current position of the learner; what the learner currently knows, or the skills that are currently being used by the learner. Vygotsky saw the role of the expert or teacher as supporting the advancement of the learner. This links directly with scaffolding strategies when designing and producing learning activities. Providing an opportunity for a learner to construct a relationship with specific materials. The incremental development of the learner. Building on prior knowledge through the construction of a tuition strategy that supports students and allows them to move from one level (zone) to the next level (zone). For example, exposing the learner to basic reading materials. These materials are then developed through an activity that will engage the learner with the materials. The materials are now being used not just as pure knowledge. The materials are put in to practise through an activity. The student is an active learner who is exploring the use of the materials in context. These may be short activities that allow the student to use a section of the materials, engage with them through the activity and obtain feedback. The feedback will inform the learner and act as a motivating factor and/or how to develop the response to the activity. The interaction with a specific task that has a direct relationship with the materials will reinforce learning. It is important that the task and tuition reflect prior materials and activities. This was the crux of Vygotsky's theory. He was providing a space for the learner to reflect on what they had learnt. To demonstrate a specific level of understanding and add-value to the previous exercise/tuition by moving to the next stage (zone). He was focusing on engaging learners and guiding that learning by supporting them through active learning.

Social learning theory

The last theory I would like to explore with you is social learning theory - Placing learning in the workplace through a lived experience by the apprentice (Wenger 1998). Wenger has produced a framework dealing with how knowledge and how learning takes place through social participation. This approach is based on situated learning, being placed in a position where learning is taking place through a socio-cultural experience. The day-to-day activities and work-related tasks being introduced to the apprentice.

Situated learning

Situated learning develops the apprentice's skills, working-knowledge within their workplace environment and a level of competence to perform a trade or profession. This theory was pioneered by Lave and Wenger (1991) who developed their work through a range of case studies dealing with different types of professionals who were undertaking their training through an apprenticeship. They created a framework referred to as legitimate peripheral participation. They saw this framework as a social structure within the work-place. The apprentice would be introduced to the tasks and profession which would be structured, observed whilst being coached or instructed within their work-place environment.

The interdependent relationship between the apprentice and employer is central to the apprenticeship model. It is a means of developing and shaping the apprentice's cognitive experience by guided learning in the workplace. Learning is developed through a series of moment-by-moment interactions between the apprentice and co-participants (Rogoff 1990; 1995 and 2003). The work-related skills acquired whilst undertaking a sequence of work-based activities are central to the learning process; taking place not in the classroom but through practice (Billett, 2012).

Range of apprenticeships – four nations

Many higher educational institutions are developing a pathway for the apprenticeship model which has been supported by the SRA's new pathway, such as the LLB in legal practice. This award is aimed at the apprenticeship model. It incorporates preparation for the LLB and SQE parts 1 and 2. The pathway is 80% informal learning in the workplace and 20% formal learning in the classroom or through distance learning.

The new forms of apprenticeship are developing across the four nations. They are at different stages of policy, development and implementation. This is as a direct result of education and skills operating under a devolved system in the UK. The decentralisation of control over certain matters, such as education, health and welfare reform is no longer predominately dealt with by central government in Westminster. The transference of power from central government to local government (devolution) is distributed to each nation state: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Therefore, the use of different terminology is used by the four nation states when dealing with apprenticeships that incorporate higher education as part of off-the-job training. Below are the different types of apprenticeships which form part of these new professional apprenticeship pathways in the UK:

England: Higher level and degree apprenticeships.

Wales: Degree apprenticeships.

Norther Ireland: Higher level apprenticeships.

Scotland: Graduate apprenticeship.

These apprenticeships include different levels of education which range from level 4 to level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education for Qualifications (FHEQ) in England,

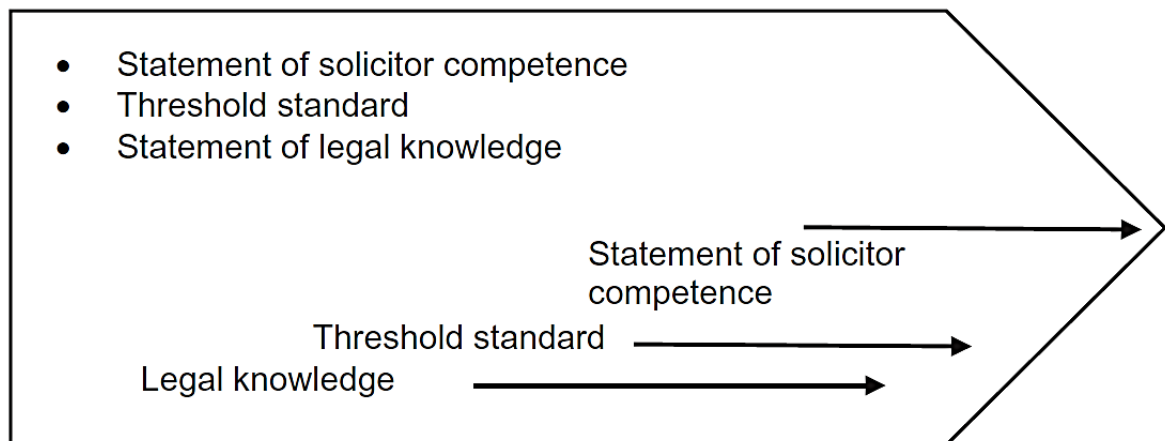
Wales and Northern Ireland. Whereas, in Scotland the apprenticeship level is based on levels 6 to 11 of the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education.

Educational provision within the workplace

The use of the apprenticeship model will challenge higher educational institutions and will also reflect the original module used to qualify as a solicitor. For example, the solicitor apprentice will be entering the workplace environment and placed in a position to train as a solicitor from day one. This is completely opposite to the trainee solicitor who would have completed a qualifying law degree, a postgraduate qualification (the legal practice course) and then entered in to a two year training (workplace) contract. The educational provision for the trainee solicitor is mandatory and is completed prior to the trainee solicitor taking up a two year workplace training contract.

For the solicitor apprentice it is the individual journey undertaken by the apprentice that will reveal their experience of learning in the workplace. This is going beyond the formal educational setting which has traditionally prepared the trainee solicitor to go in to practise. This is "... learning through practice that addresses contemporary and emerging requirements" (Billett, 2012 at 3.37) that is shaping learning on its own terms and not solely reliant on educational provision being front-loaded before work-based learning is introduced (Billett, 2012 at 4.01).

One of the significant factors that needs to be remembered is that the qualifying work experience is not signing off competence to qualify as a solicitor. Competence and fitness to qualify as a solicitor is the domain of the Solicitor Qualifying Exams (SQE) which will deal with competence. Below is a diagram which illustrates the Solicitors Statement of Competence which is made up of a statement, the threshold standard and legal knowledge. It is a combination of these areas that need to be demonstrated through the SQE. The QWE will provide the practical skills that will be developed from the work-based learning and is part of the qualifying criteria.



Taken from Fletcher, R. (2016) Legal Education and Proposed Regulation of the Legal Profession in England and Wales: a transformation or a tragedy? *The Law Teacher – The International Journal of Legal Education*, Vol.50, No.3, pp.371-385 at page 379.

Concluding points

When entering the design stage please reflect on the different approaches to learning and consider which type or types of learning you are adopting. How this approach will support learning and you say how learning is taking place, where learning is taking place and how you know learning has taken place.

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